

## Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

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FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8613

INFO AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PRIORITY

S E C R E T LIBREVILLE 2419

NOFORN

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: PINS, PINR, PINT, CM, GB, EK

SUBJECT: POSSIBILITY OF CLASH BETWEEN GABON AND CAMEROON

REF: YAOUNDE 4510

SUMMARY: NO INDICATION HERE OF ANY GOG INTEREST, OR PREPARATIONS FOR, MILITARY ACTION AGAINST NEIGHBORS, AND SERIOUS QUESTION WHETHER GABONESE COULD IN FACT MOUNT OPERATION GREATER THAN PLATOON SIZE. IF SMALL SCALE GABONESE TROOP MOVEMENTS IN FACT OCCURRING, PURPOSE MIGHT BE TO STRENGTHEN DEFENSIVE POSTURE VIS-A-VIS EQUATORIAL GUINEA, WHICH HAS LONG BEEN GOGS PRINCIPAL CONCERN ON NORTHERN BORDER. END SUMMARY.

1. EMBASSY HAS SEEN NO INDICATION OF UNUSUAL MILITARY ACTIVITY OR TROOP MOVEMENTS BY EITHER GABONESE OR FRENCH WHICH WOULD LEND SUBSTANCE TO CAMEROONIAN FEARS REPORTED REFTEL.

2. AS PRACTICAL MATTER, GABONESE FORCES (ARMY, GENDARMERIE, POLICE, PRESIDENTIAL GUARD) ARE ALL DEFICIENT IN MOBILITY AND ARE PROBABLY INCAPABLE OF MOUNTING OPERATION MUCH BEYOND PLATOON SIZE. IN ADDITION, HEAVY RAINS DURING PAST MONTH HAVE RENDERED ROADS TO NORTHERN GABON VIRTUALLY IMPASSABLE, MAKING IT UNLIKELY THAT EVEN WELL EQUIPPED FORCE COULD REACH BORDER REGION EXCEPT BY

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AIR (WHICH WOULD PRECLUDE BRINGING ANYTHING BUT LIGHT

EQUIPMENT).

3. AS FOR FRENCH, THEIR TWO INFANTRY COMPANIES AND TWO ARMORED PLATOONS HAVE VERY SPECIFIC MISSION HERE WHICH KEEPS THEM CLOSE TO HOME BASE NEAR LIBREVILLE AIRPORT. AS PARA 7 REFTEL APTLY OBSERVES, SQUEEZE BETWEEN GURC AND GOG IS NO PLACE FOR FRENCH FORCES, SO THEY CAN ALMOST CERTAINLY BE COUNTED ON TO MIND THEIR OWN BUSINESS. SAME PRESUMABLY APPLIES TO CONSIDERABLE EXTENT TO FRENCH MILITARY PERSONNEL SERVING WITH GABONESE FORCES, WHOSE INFLUENCE COULD ALSO BE COUNTED ON TO DISCOURAGE ANY ACTION DIRECTED AGAINST CAMEROON.

4. BY COINCIDENCE, DCM DISCUSSED RECENT BORDER INCIDENT NOVEMBER 23 WITH HIS FRENCH OPPOSITE NUMBER, WHO DISCLAIMED ANY SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES BUT OFFERED PERSONAL VIEW THAT EQUATORIAL GUINEANS WERE MOST LIKELY CULPRITS. WE HAVE NO REASON TO SUSPECT HE WAS DISSEMBLING, AND TEND TO ACCEPT AT FACE VALUE HIS INFERENCE THAT FRENCH NEITHER INVOLVED NOR PARTICULARLY CONCERNED.

5. WHILE EQUATORIAL GUINEANS MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE MOUNTED ACTUAL ATTACK ON GENDARMERIE POST, EG MAY PERHAPS HAVE BEEN REAL REASON WHY INCIDENT TOOK PLACE. FRENCH MILITARY OFFICER HERE LIKE FRENCH ATTACHE IN YAOUNDE (YAOUNDE 4469) SPECULATED TO US LAST WEEK THAT GABONESE HAD THEMSELVES DESTROYED POST BUT COULD OFFER NO REASON WHY THEY HAD DONE SO. IN PONDERING THIS RIDDLE, WE HAVE EVOLVED TENTATIVE HYPOTHESIS THAT DESTRUCTION OF POST MAY HAVE BEEN UNDERTAKEN BY GOG, PROBABLY IN COLLUSION WITH GURC, AS EXCUSE FOR CLOSING BORDER WITH EG AND REINFORCING DEFENSIVE POSITIONS ALONG GABONESE SIDE OF FRONTIER. THIS HYPOTHESIS WOULD ACCOUNT FOR ANY GABONESE TROOP MOVEMENTS WHICH MIGHT IN FACT BE OCCURRING AND COLLUSION THEORY WOULD ALSO EXPLAIN GURC TROOP MOVEMENTS IN SAME DIRECTION UNDER NOMINAL COVER OF RESPONDING TO "GABONESE THREAT".

6. WHY WOULD GOG WANT TO BEEF UP FORCES ALONG EG BORDER AT THIS PARTICULAR TIME? SEVERAL SCRAPS ACCUMULATED IN RECENT WEEKS SUGGEST ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION, THOUGH HARD FACTS ARE STILL SCARCE. EG REFUGEES, WHO STOP BY EMBASSY PERIODICALLY TO  
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BE TURNED DOWN IN REQUESTS FOR USG SUPPORT, ALLEGED TWO WEEKS AGO THAT GOG WAS ON VERGE OF GRANTING THEM REFUGEE STATUS AND WAS PROVIDING CLANDESTINE ARMS AID IN PREPARATION FOR MILITARY ACTION AGAINST MACIE REGIME. UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE MENTIONED THIS WEEK HIS UNDERSTANDING THAT GOG DECREE ACCORDING REFUGEE STATUS TO EQUATORIAL GUINEANS IN GABON HAS NOW BEEN SIGNED. IF THESE REPORTS CORRECT, GOG MAY WELL FEAR HOSTILE REACTION FROM MACIE REGIME, PERHAPS INCLUDING ARMED

RETALIATION FOR ANY INCURSIONS FROM GABON BY GOG ARMED "REF-UGES". THIS IN TURN WOULD EXPLAIN DESIRE TO REINFORCE BORDER DISPOSITIONS, FOR WHICH "INCIDENT" COOKED UP WITH GURC WOULD PROVIDE EXCELLENT PRETEXT FOR TROOP MOVEMENTS NOT DIRECTLY AIMED AT GOG.

7. WISH TO REEMPHASIZE THAT ABOVE IS LARGELY SPECULATIVE SINCE HARD FACTS SINGULARLY LACKING, BUT NONETHELESS IS HYPOTHESIS WHICH BEST FITS SCRAPS CURRENTLY AVAILABLE. KEY CONCLUSION IN ANY EVENT IS THAT GABON CAMEROON CLASH LOOKS FROM HERE HIGHLY UNLIKELY ESPECIALLY AT MOMENT WHEN BONGO TRYING SO HARD TO MAKE AND KEEP FRIENDS IN ANTICIPATION OF OAU SUMMIT AND PRESIDENCY. STEIGMAN

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